



2002 Wetlands Reserve Program

Mississippi Summary

Overview

The floodplain of the Mississippi delta once comprised a vast and unique wetland ecosystem consisting of bottomland hardwood forests, oxbow lakes, and cypress swamps. These characteristics, along with the region's long growing season and mild winter temperature produced extremely diverse and species rich wildlife habitat, including wintering feeding grounds for the largest population of migratory waterfowl in North America. However, it is estimated that 78 percent of these bottomland hardwood wetland forests have now been converted. The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) in Mississippi emphasizes the restoration and protection of this delta ecoregion, which contains many Federally listed threatened and endangered species.

Since 1992, there have been 327 WRP easements enrolled in Mississippi, encompassing 117,622 acres. The program is very popular with landowners.

Since 1992, reforestation of WRP bottomland hardwood forests has been completed on over 84,000 acres using direct-seeding techniques and planting of bare-root seedlings. Additionally, hydrology restoration enhancement measures have been completed on approximately 19,700 acres. Currently in Mississippi, working through partnerships, NRCS is restoring an estimated 13,000 acres of wildlife habitat annually.

Program Benefits

The Mississippi delta is one of the most intensively farmed regions in the United States. Several million acres of cotton, rice, soybeans, corn and catfish are grown annually. Croplands enrolled into WRP are planted to bottomland hardwood forests which improve water quality by filtering out sediments and nutrients that would otherwise end up in the Mississippi River; eventually making their way to the Gulf of Mexico. Reforestation of WRP bottomland hardwood forest ecosystems is also providing critical habitat for many species of endangered fish and wildlife, including the Louisiana Black Bear.

WRP is helping many family farms by providing opportunities for a diversified income through hunting leases, which are very popular in the South. Financial stresses in the farming industry have also meant WRP has provided some farmers with an optional source of income by enrolling in WRP.

Partnerships

The restoration of WRP lands is being accomplished in Mississippi through cooperative agreements between NRCS and Ducks Unlimited, Mississippi Fish & Wildlife Foundation, and Delta Wildlife. These organizations are providing reforestation of bottomland hardwoods through planting hardwood seedlings, and constructing hydrology restoration and enhancement measures according to NRCS standards and specifications. These activities are being performed "at cost" by WRP partners, because wetland restoration of WRP lands in the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley accomplishes their organizational goals of restoring wetland wildlife habitat.

Contact

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